

## **KIM RUSK FEATURED SEA STAR!**

Kindergarten is not the grade most people think of when they hear 'science in the classroom.' In fact, many people consider 5-year-olds too young to absorb much "real science." Kindergarten teacher Kim Rusk disagrees!

Kim's 5-year-old students can identify major fish groups based on shape and color. They create their own imaginary fish and discuss the special adaptations they gave their fish for living in the ocean. They learn about the properties of gas, liquid and solid by activities such as observing the effect of carbon dioxide on raisins in a jar of liquid. Students never know what crazy (and by-the-way educational) activity Ms. Rusk will have them doing next!

Kim received her SCUBA certification in 1995 and hasn't looked back since. "I actually didn't really get to dive until the spring of 1996. That year I took 5 trips and logged almost 75 dives. I was hooked." She has used her SCUBA experiences and photographs and the video she collects during her travels to bring the ocean into the classroom. In a school where the majority of students come from families that cannot provide a high level of enrichment activities for their children, this gift is priceless.

Kim's teaching does not end with her kindergarten students. She also volunteers as a teacher mentor at her school, helping other primary grade teachers bring more science into the curriculum. The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) has benefited greatly from Ms. Rusk's talents. "What greatly surprised me was that only 1 in 5 people that live on the Gulf Coast even knew that we had a National Marine Sanctuary at our door. Many people had never heard of the Flower Garden Banks." This then became a personal endeavor; she was determined to educate anyone who would listen about FGBNMS.

Kim also volunteers as a Naturalist on Board, going out on recreational dive trips to teach divers about the sanctuary resources and how they can help protect them. Since participating in the sanctuary's very first Down Under, Out Yonder (DUOY) Education Workshop in 1996, Ms. Rusk has been an avid supporter of the sanctuary's education and outreach programs. For the past seven years, Ms. Rusk has secured free meeting facilities and made the local arrangements for the two annual DUOY workshops. She actively encourages other teachers to participate in the workshops. Despite a very busy professional and personal life, Kim always has time to help educate the public by staffing sanctuary exhibits, contributing to naturalist trainings and trips, fish identification classes, video development, shipping or whatever need arises.

Even while on vacation, she spreads the message; more than one request for sanctuary information has been requested from someone who heard about FGNMS from Ms. Rusk while on a dive trip in the Pacific.

“By presenting and teaching a few, the domino effect of education continues to reach many different constitutes. I will continue to volunteer and help the Flower Garden Banks NMS as much as I can. It is not only a personal endeavor to teach others about FGBNMS, it is something that I truly love.”

Ms. Rusk is the perfect role model for both children and adults to see that exploration, learning and discovery continue long after school ends.